

National Unity and Diversity and the Language(s) We Speak

INTRODUCTION

Our national motto is *E Pluribus Unum* (“one out of many”), and much of our political heritage has evolved from the tension implicit in the complex philosophy underlying those three words. While we hope to forge one nation from our many peoples and cultures, the nation we intend to create is one that protects our individual right to maintain our differences. As the nation progresses and grows, we try to make sense out of U.S. society. But it is difficult to decide who we are because U.S. identity is complex and our demographics are constantly changing. Sometimes the debate, which ought to involve thoughtful negotiation, turns angry and acrimonious.

Immigration trends combined with economic distress have brought tension about culture and language difference to the forefront of debate at every level, from the United States Congress to the local coffee shop. This chapter will explore questions about cultural and linguistic assimilation in the U.S. context and revisit the way these issues, especially those related to language, play out in public schools.

Key Questions: *How is the U.S. population changing and what are the implications for schooling? How does language resistance manifest in the United States? What is the English-only movement and how does it affect schooling?*

● Changing Demographics

Immigration

According to a working paper published by the U.S. Census Bureau, “[t]he estimated size of the foreign-born population of the United States in 2002 was 32.5 million. . . . In absolute terms, this estimate represented an increase of 64.2 percent or 12.7 million over the estimated 19.8 million in the 1990 census, the largest foreign-born population living in the United States since record-keeping began in 1850” (Schmidley & Robinson, 2003, p. 1). Suarez-Orozco (2005) notes that the current wave of immigrants differs from previous immigrants in its intensity and diversity. “Until 1950, nearly 90 percent of all immigrants were Europeans or Canadians. Today, more than 50 percent of all immigrants are Latin American, and more than 25 percent are Asian” (p. 13).

Furthermore, newly arrived immigrants come from incredibly diverse backgrounds, from the highly skilled Asian Indians who find work in Silicon Valley to the uneducated and unskilled workers, many undocumented, who do farmwork, child care, and housecleaning, and fly under the radar in any number of low-paid jobs (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

Immigration: A Historical Perspective

Suarez-Orozco comments that the United States is “arguably the only postindustrial democracy in the world where immigration is at once history and destiny” (2005, p. 70). Compelled by war or famine or lured by the prospect of life in a new and exciting world, people have been immigrating to the New World since before the inception of the United States as a nation.

Following the American Revolution and all through the nineteenth century, social, political, and economic upheaval resulted in an influx of people from all over the world, lured by the prospect of economic success and dreams of freedom from oppression. The Irish arrived, fleeing starvation and oppression. German and Scandinavian farmers were attracted by the farmlands of the Midwest. Chinese laborers built our transcontinental railroad lines, and Mexican laborers built the railroads that ran north and south. Italians, Poles, and Czechs also made their way to the United States in the late 1800s.

The nineteenth-century wave of immigration swelled into the twentieth century, reaching a peak between 1900 and 1920, when Italians and Eastern European Jews flooded East Coast ports, and Mexicans, displaced by the Revolution of 1910, immigrated northward to the Southwest and California.

Reaction to newcomers was swift and often vicious. Xenophobia (a fear of things that seem foreign) and racism led to attempts to limit immigration. The Irish, one of the most significant groups seeking refuge in the United States, were greeted with open hostility. Their inability to speak English and their Catholicism were focal points for nativist attacks and gave rise in the middle of the nineteenth century to the Know Nothing party, which sought to restrict immigration.

On the West Coast, nineteenth-century nativism focused on Chinese immigrants who came during the California Gold Rush and stayed to build the railroads and work in agriculture. The Naturalization Act of 1870 barred Asians from citizenship; the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 denied citizenship to Chinese workers already in the United States and barred further entries. The 1917 Immigration Act excluded Asians, and the National Origins Act of 1924 established immigration quotas for nations outside the Western Hemisphere (Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild, 1981).

Italians and Jews, along with many others, arrived at Ellis Island in New York; Galveston, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; and other ports of entry, where they were received with the distrust and distaste that seems to greet all newcomers to our shores.

Mexicans, displaced by the Mexican Revolution in 1910, headed north in unprecedented numbers. Following the stock market crash of 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression, President Herbert Hoover made scapegoats of Mexican immigrants and initiated a repatriation movement. Concentrating on southern California and Texas, immigration officers conducted massive raids in parks, social halls, and workplaces and unceremoniously loaded literally thousands of people, regardless of their status, onto trains headed for Mexico. Many deported in that fashion were U.S. born and had never stepped foot on Mexican soil. Children were separated from their parents, husbands from their wives. People lost their livelihoods and their homes, and lives were irreversibly shattered in one of the most ignominious chapters in U.S. history (Boisson, 2006).

Over the course of the twentieth century, various kinds of legislation limited immigration. In some cases, limitations were based on place of origin (McCarran-Walter Immigration Act, 1952) or political affiliation (Internal Security Act, 1950). Policy in the latter half of the twentieth century, however, keeping pace with changing public attitudes and economic conditions, took a new and somewhat less reactionary direction. The Immigration and Nationality Act (1965), which dramatically altered the shape of U.S. immigration policy, eliminated the national origin quota system and opened our doors to unprecedented diversity. Other kinds of legislation offer exceptions for refugees (Refugee Act, 1980). In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act created an amnesty and offered an opportunity for undocumented residents to become citizens. The overall number of immigrants allowed into the United States annually was increased by the Immigration Act of 1990.

Current immigration reform efforts focus on undocumented immigrants. The estimated number of undocumented people in the United States and the impact of their presence on the economy, which is often the flashpoint for debate, vary dramatically, depending on who is counting and for what purpose. Generally, supporters of anti-immigration legislation target Mexicans, on the assumption that they comprise the largest number of undocumented entries to the United States. At this writing, the federal government has stalled

in efforts to address the question of undocumented immigration through legislative reform. This failure has opened the door to any number of local initiatives, many of which trade on xenophobia and resemble the misguided nativist efforts of our past (Kotlowitz, 2007).

Other Demographic Factors

While steady and varied immigration has an undeniable and dynamic impact on our profile as a nation, it is not the only factor that affects the demographic picture. Differential rates of growth among various groups also have a significant effect on our population. The baby boom that occurred after World War II was primarily a white middle-class phenomenon, and the rate of growth in that segment of the population has decreased significantly. People of color in the United States are younger than white people and have higher birth rates. In 2010, 48 percent of newborns in the United States were members of minority groups, compared with just a fifth of those over age 65 (Tavernise & Gebeloff, 2010).

It's also worth noting that distribution of immigrants across the United States is changing. The states that traditionally have been the destinations for new Americans (California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey, Illinois) have seen a decline in the growth rates of their immigrant populations, while North Carolina, Georgia, Nevada, and Arkansas saw high growth entering the new millennium (Capps, Fix, & Passel, 2002). Tavernise and Gebeloff's (2010) analysis of census data suggests that immigrants in search of jobs are increasingly migrating to rural and suburban areas. The new diversity of immigrants, and their presence across the United States and especially in areas that have traditionally been homogenous, may well contribute to the current anxiety about immigration playing out in the political arena.

Implications for Teachers

Changing demographics and a new cultural landscape mean that all teachers must develop skills to work with students who may be:

- *Language minority:* Language minority children have a person who speaks a language other than English in their homes. They may be bilingual or may speak only English. In either case, they are likely to have links to an ethnic minority culture.
- *English language learners:* According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA, 2010), in 2007–2008 there were approximately 5.3 million English language learners in grades K–12 in public schools in the United States. While total public school enrollment rose about 8.55 between 1997 and 2008, the number of English language learners grew by an astonishing 53 percent.

Enrollments of students with limited proficiency in English are predictably high in certain states. California, for example, which enrolls approximately 10 percent of the nation's schoolchildren, identified approximately 1.5 million

English language learners in grades K through 12 in 2009–2010 (California State Department of Education, 2011). Other states with high enrollments of English learners include Arizona, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas.

But enrollments are not limited to those areas, and increases in the English learner student population are large in places you might not expect. In the ten school years between 1997 and 2008, eleven states (Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia) experienced over 200 percent growth in the number of English learners enrolled in school. Updated information about your state’s student population is available from the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition at www.ncela.gwu.edu. The website for the state department of education in your state is another useful source of up-to-date demographic information.

The school has traditionally been a gateway to mainstream culture for the diverse groups that make up U.S. society. As the population changes, and indeed as our concept of mainstream culture is altered by the groups that enter it, teachers will need to develop a deep understanding of the nature of culture and the implications of diversity in the classroom.

● A Changing National Narrative

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, political emphasis was placed on the concept of *unum*, crystallized at the beginning of the twentieth century as the “melting pot” (Gleason, 1984). The melting pot was envisioned as a process of ethnic and racial fusion, but it can also be seen as a call for Anglo conformity. In the melting pot, a person was expected to “Americanize”—to emerge looking, sounding, and acting like a white person of northern European background. “Melting” was a misnomer in this context because it did not involve a synthesis of all the elements involved.

As the various ethnic groups comprising the population of the United States have established themselves socially and politically, they have begun to view their ethnic heritages positively. Emphasis has moved to *pluribus*; a cultural pluralist view of U.S. society has emerged, suggesting that it is possible to be unified while still maintaining diversity. The most common analogy for the cultural pluralist view is the salad bowl. All the ingredients in a salad bowl make contributions to the whole, but each one maintains its own distinguishable identity.

The salad bowl image is still a useful way to think about ourselves, but the question of U.S. identity is further complicated by the emergence of new technologies. Unlike immigrants in earlier times, new Americans do not have to sever ties with their original homelands. The availability and low cost of email and other telecommunications make it possible to stay in touch across enormous distances. Transcontinental travel, once available only to the wealthy, is relatively inexpensive, and barring political barriers, people can, and often do, return regularly to their places of origin.

It's worth noting, as Suarez-Orozco (2005) points out, that technological changes in communication and transportation create two-way streets. As U.S. culture is changed by the arrival of newcomers, root cultures in today's world are changed by their exposure to U.S. values, images, artifacts, and lifestyles. Often the conduit for that change is the immigrants themselves, who transmit resources, ideas, and political influence from the United States with every phone call or visit.

For example, expatriate Indians who have made their fortunes in the technology boom in the United States have lent their talent and resources toward creating a national identity database in India, which will change the economic and social landscape of India. Until now, millions of people have had no way to identify themselves for purposes of securing loans or claiming government services (Tribes still matter, 2011). And the so-called Lost Boys, young boys orphaned by civil war in Sudan and relocated to the United States in 1987, recently voted in an election that established Sudan as an independent nation (Newman, 2011).

All in all, we are increasingly a nation of minorities, and our identities play out across a spectrum of multiple hues and shades. At one end, American Amish live in separate enclaves, maintaining their own distinctive social organization and language. At the other end, many Americans function almost exclusively in the cultural mainstream, affirming their ethnicity only on special occasions, if at all, with traditional food, dress, or rituals. Many of us are multicultural and don't readily fall into easily defined categories. In other words, ethnicity itself has been altered by the American experience.

Unity, Diversity, and Language

You've probably recently heard somebody complain that they can't understand customer service personnel who speak English as a second language. Or maybe you've heard somebody ask, "Why should I press 1 for English?!" Nativist reactions to immigration invariably include language resistance. Language resistance includes language parochialism, the attitude that multilingualism is not useful and may even be harmful, and language elitism, the attitude that bilingualism is desirable for individuals of elevated status but unacceptable for members of ethnic minority groups. Parochialism and elitism are costly—both economically and politically—and they set the stage for restrictionism. Language restrictionism is the attempt to formally promulgate a language policy that imposes restrictions on language use.

Language Parochialism

Language parochialism might be characterized as an attitude about language that holds multilingualism in low regard and fails to acknowledge the benefits of language sophistication. Over 30 years ago, Paul Simon, at that time a congressman from Illinois, wrote a book titled *The Tongue-Tied American* (1980), which details the effects of language parochialism. Simon was ahead of his time in his insistence that U.S. resistance to language learning and negative

attitudes about bilingualism are costly to our nation. In the twenty-first century, the ability to speak languages other than English is critical both politically and economically.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE It is common wisdom that you can buy in any language but you should sell in the language of your customer. Around the world, salespeople are expected to be multilingual. U.S. businesspeople, however, generally expect to conduct business in English, and our monolingualism and lack of cultural sensitivity has damaged our viability in the international marketplace. Simon (1980) cataloged some of our more embarrassing attempts to advertise in foreign markets and the bloopers he listed have become famous:

“Body by Fisher,” describing a General Motors product, came out “Corpse by Fisher” in Flemish. . . . Schweppes Tonic was advertised in Italy as “bathroom water.” . . . “Come Alive With Pepsi” almost appeared in the Chinese version of the *Reader’s Digest* as “Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave.” (p. 32)

Translation errors are amusing, but the economic outcomes of our parochialism are not. A study evaluating the Fulbright-Hays programs that support research on language acquisition and language training is emphatic: “Growth in the language services sector has been explosive in recent years, reflecting similar growth in private-sector demand for language expertise. Large sectors of the economy—such as software, telecommunications, and financial services—are unable to penetrate foreign markets or . . . to develop products and services in the languages of their prospective customers, because of a shortage of language expertise” (Brecht & Rivers, 2000, p. xi).

NATIONAL SECURITY During World War II, the military recognized the need for personnel with skills in foreign languages as essential to our national defense. As a result, the U.S. Army took a leadership role in developing innovative language teaching strategies. After the war, the National Defense Education Act (1958) provided financial assistance to stimulate foreign language study. Funding for the act continued for a decade, and during that period of support, enrollment in high school foreign language courses in the United States increased from 16.5 to 27.7 percent (Benderson, 1983). Unfortunately, in the decades following that trend, national interest in the study of foreign languages declined, and monolingualism hampered our national security efforts.

For example, during the revolution in Iran in 1978 only 6 of the 60 U.S. Foreign Service officers assigned there were Farsi speakers (Kondracke, 1979). At that time, anti-U.S. feeling in Iran escalated to monumental proportions, culminating in a situation where 53 U.S. embassy personnel were held hostage for nearly a year. According to Simon (1980), only one of the 120 journalists assigned to Iran during the hostage crisis spoke Farsi.

More recently, the demand has surged for speakers of Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages (Dillon, 2003). In a government report (U.S. General Accountability Office [GAO], 2002) highlighting the issue, the GAO reviewed four federal agencies, including the U.S. Army, the U.S. Department of State,

the Foreign Commercial Service, and the FBI, and found shortages of speakers of foreign languages. The report also found deficiencies in the skills of people who hold positions that require abilities in foreign languages. For example, the U.S. Army reported in 2001 that they had filled only 42 of 84 positions authorized for Arabic interpreters and translators (p. 7). And even five years after the events of September 11, 2001, citing the agency's own statistics, the *Washington Post* reported that "only 33 FBI agents have even a limited proficiency in Arabic, and none of them work in sections of the bureau that coordinate investigations of international terrorism" (Eggen, 2006). The FBI has begun an aggressive campaign, however, designed to identify and fast-track recruits who have proficiency in languages essential to national defense (Temple-Raston, 2007).

Americans often assume that everyone speaks English. English is widely used as the language of science and commerce and is the language most used as a second language around the world (Ferguson, 1978). Widespread use of English may facilitate your shopping on a pleasure trip. It is unlikely, however, that you would be able to take the measure of a sensitive political situation in a foreign country using only English.

English speakers in non-English-speaking countries are likely to be members of a country's educated elite and may therefore be incapable of properly assessing the total political climate in which they live. Also, intelligence gathered in English or translated may be inaccurate, lacking in significant cultural and social nuances. The Iranian situation is but one instance where lack of language resources has placed the United States in a politically dangerous situation.

Recently, there has been renewed interest in foreign language instruction at the elementary level. According to Glod (2006), a significant number of elementary schools in the Washington, DC, area, responding to calls of business and government leaders, have initiated programs in Spanish, French, Arabic, and Mandarin, among other languages. In addition, enrollments in foreign language classes at the university level are increasing. A survey by the Modern Language Association (Welles, 2004) indicates that, between 1998 and 2002, the number of college students studying a language increased 17.9 percent, to 1.4 million. After Spanish, French, and German, students favored Italian, American Sign Language, Japanese, Chinese, Latin, Russian, ancient Greek, biblical Hebrew, Arabic, modern Hebrew, Portuguese, and Korean. In addition, there has been noticeable growth in student enrollment in languages that the Modern Language Association identifies as "less commonly taught," including Vietnamese, Hindi, Aramaic, and Swahili.

Early in 2006, the Bush administration launched the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) to address the need to strengthen national security through foreign language study (U.S. Department of State, 2006). Although the initiative designated significant funds to support foreign language instruction at every level of education, it was never fully funded (Zehr, 2007). NSLI has made modest inroads, but without full funding, it is unlikely to make the United States competitive.

As other countries have known for some time (Pufahl, Rhodes, & Christian, 2000), foreign language instruction takes time and requires a supportive policy infrastructure. Many industrialized countries start teaching world languages in elementary school, but according to Jackson, Kolb, and Wilson (2011), as of 2008 world languages were offered in only 25 percent of the elementary schools in the United States, down from 31 percent in 1997, and “. . . only half of all American high school students take even one year of a world language.”

Language Elitism

In the United States, bilingualism has often been viewed with disfavor. This approach is particularly wasteful given that we have large numbers of people within our borders who speak languages other than English and who could serve as language resources to our entire nation.

Yet our attitudes toward bilingualism are ambivalent. We consider it a worthwhile accomplishment for a college graduate from an English-speaking background to master a second language. But we insist that the children of immigrant families relinquish their first languages as part of their “Americanization.” Kjolseth (1983) has suggested that we tend to admire individual bilinguals, such as celebrities, scholars, and diplomats, and to disparage group bilinguals, or members of ethnic groups. In the popular view, individual bilingualism is often associated with elevated socioeconomic status; group bilingualism is generally associated with poverty and lack of education. Individual bilinguals acquire their second language through effort and scholarship; group bilinguals acquire their second language at home.

An eighth-grade student from a family of migrant farmworkers in Colorado told me, “I like school better here than in Texas. In Texas they punished me for speaking Spanish in school. The white kids were learning Spanish and tried to practice with us, but when we answered them we got punished.” We fail to recognize that bilingualism is valuable regardless of its source.

Hunger for Memory (1982), the autobiography of Richard Rodriguez, the popular pundit and media personality, received much attention when it was published because the author suggested that giving up Spanish was a first and essential step on his road to “Americanization.” Opponents of dual language instruction hailed the book and pointed to the author’s experiences as proof that English monolingualism leads to successful assimilation. But a persistently apologetic and yearning tone underlies Rodriguez’s autobiography, leading the reader to question his assertion that giving up Spanish was necessary and positive.

American attitudes toward language study are not shared around the world. Following the European Year of Languages in 2001, in 2003 the European Commission, the executive branch of the European Union, adopted an action plan that promotes language learning and language diversity. The introduction to the action plan states quite simply that “the ability to understand and communicate in other languages is a basic skill for all European citizens”

(Commission of the European Communities, 2003, p. 1). And an informal survey in my own classrooms each semester reveals that, unlike students educated in the United States, students educated in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East almost always were required to study at least one foreign language as a matter of course.

Elitist attitudes about bilingualism cause us to squander our linguistic resources. One can only wonder how many children enter schools in the United States where the use of their first language is discouraged or even punished, only to enroll in high school foreign language classes to try to recapture some of their lost language wealth. Entrenched in English monolingualism, we fail to acknowledge our multilingualism as a national resource, we limit our ability to trade on world markets, and we endanger national security.

Language Restrictionism

Language restrictionism is not new in the United States, but it is a persistent political movement that could have devastating effects both on our education systems and on our political and economic success as a nation. The most visible face of language restrictionism is U.S. English. Founded in 1983 by then-senator S. I. Hayakawa, U.S. English claims 1.8 million members (U.S. English, 2011). Its efforts are directed primarily at making English the official language of the United States. While U.S. English has not been successful at the federal level, it has contributed to the success of official English legislation in 28 states.

Support for the English-only movement is far from unanimous, and language restrictionist laws have not gone unchallenged. Arizona, for example, amended its state constitution in 1988, making English the language of all government actions. In 1994, however, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit upheld a federal district court ruling that held the Arizona English-only law in violation of constitutional First Amendment protection of free speech (Contín, 1995). In 1998, Alaska passed an English-only initiative, but in 2002 a Superior Court judge ruled that the initiative violated the free speech provisions of the Alaska Constitution.

Probably the most contested language ground outside schooling is voting. Voting is a fundamental right. In 1975 Congress amended the Voting Rights Act to prohibit English-only elections and to require bilingual ballots in jurisdictions where the language minority population exceeds 5 percent and illiteracy rates exceed national norms. English-only advocates, who see English as a tool for promoting unity and see participation in the political process as an incentive to learn English, have targeted bilingual ballots and voting materials.

But it's worth noting that encouraging people to vote, regardless of their English proficiency, encourages the assimilation process. Where bilingual ballots are used, ethnic minorities' participation in the political system has increased. New Mexico has had bilingual voting since it became a state in 1912, and it is the only state where the number of Hispanics in the state legislature is in proportion to their representation in the general population (Trasvina, 1981).

LANGUAGE AND LOYALTY

Periods of intense immigration often provoke U.S. nativism and with it, language restrictionism. People who want to restrict language often tie language to political loyalty, even though history bears witness that demeaning or restricting people's use of a particular language is usually a veiled way of demeaning the people themselves. Some prominent U.S. political figures have made the mistake of confusing language and loyalty. In 1751, referring to German immigrants, who were numerous at the time, Benjamin Franklin complained:

Why should the Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our settlements and by herding together, establish their language to the exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them? (Conklin & Lourie, 1983, p. 69)

In 1753, in a letter to a member of the British parliament, Franklin commented:

Those [Germans] who come hither are generally the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their own Nation, and as Ignorance is often attended with Credulity when Knavery would mislead it, and with Suspicion when Honesty would set it right; and as few of the English understand the German Language, and so cannot address them either from the Press or Pulpit, 'tis almost impossible to remove any prejudices they once entertain. (Crawford, 1992b, p. 19)

Two hundred and fifty years later, Newt Gingrich, then Speaker of the House, commented in his book, *To Renew America* (Gingrich, 1995, pp. 176–78):

[I]f people had wanted to remain immersed in their old culture, they could have done so without coming to America. . . . Bilingualism keeps people actively tied to their old language and habits and maximizes the cost of the transition of becoming an American. . . . America can absorb an amazing number of people from an astonishing range of backgrounds if our goal is assimilation. If people are being encouraged to resist assimilation, the very fabric of American society will eventually break down. . . . The only viable alternative for the American underclass is American civilization. Without English as a common language, there is no such civilization.

Thumbs up to the United States Supreme Court, which declared in 1923 in *Meyer v. Nebraska* (62 U.S. 390 [1923]) that:

. . . the individual has certain fundamental rights that must be respected. The protection of the Constitution extends to all, to those who speak other languages as well as to those born with English on the tongue. Perhaps it would be highly advantageous if all had ready understanding of our ordinary speech, but this cannot be coerced with methods which conflict with the Constitution. . . . No emergency has arisen which renders knowledge by a child of some language other than English so clearly harmful as to justify its inhibition with the consequent infringement of rights long freely enjoyed.

And thumbs up to the New Mexico state legislature that declared in 1989 in an English Plus Resolution (Crawford, 1992b, p. 154):

Proficiency on the part of our citizens in more than one language is to the economic and cultural benefit of our state and the nation.

● Implications for Schooling

Restrictions on Bilingual Programs

As part of their agenda, English-only proponents want to limit the time children spend in bilingual education programs. Del Valle (2003) points out that “deciding in which language to educate students is a distinctly different inquiry than whether the parents of these children should be able to vote in a language they can understand. Supporters of English-only, however, can garner greater support by conflating the two issues, especially when there is such national anxiety over bilingual education in particular” (p. 56).

English for the Children, a language restrictionist organization aimed at eliminating bilingual education, leveraged the general public’s anxiety to great advantage. Formed in 1997 by Ron Unz, a California businessman, the organization promoted laws against bilingual education that were passed in California, Arizona, and Colorado. “English for the children” is misleading, given that bilingual programs for English language learners are meant to facilitate English acquisition. But as we will see, the rationale for primary language instruction for second language learners is complex and requires an understanding of language, linguistics, and pedagogy. The “English for the Children” message is simple and saleable and did well in referendum votes.

As we will see in Chapter 5, bilingual programs for English learners focus largely on English language acquisition. To accomplish that goal, teachers may use languages other than English in the classroom because research shows that primary language instruction is a useful instructional bridge to English. The imposition of language restrictionist legislation may actually disable effective instruction for English learners. Policies that address classroom practice have the indirect effect of changing the emphases of professional development for teachers. de Jong, Arias, & Sanchez (2010) point out that “. . . the current system not only fails to prepare future teachers adequately but also limits practicing teachers in their ability to provide effective learning environments for their students” (p. 131). It’s difficult to imagine subjecting any other form of pedagogy to a referendum vote, but educational success for second language learners is not the real center of the debate for opponents of bilingual education. Rather, bilingual education is one battlefield in a larger political war about U.S. identity.

Dual language instruction will be the subject of ongoing controversy, persisting at best in a transitional and compensatory mode, until the U.S. public begins to understand what privileged classes around the world have always known—that bilingualism is socially, politically, and economically desirable. In discussing U.S. language policy, the sociolinguist Joshua A. Fishman (1981) observed:

Language policy involves a vision of America. A multilingual enrichment policy envisages a multilingual America as being in the public good. We support a multi-party system. . . . Our anti-trust laws aim to diversify the economic market place. We can similarly diversify the cultural marketplace. . . . There is a vision of American magnanimity involved, but more than that, a vision of American possibilities, opportunities, appreciations, sensitivities, that we all should savour. (pp. 525–526)

Outcomes

The fears of those who oppose the English-only movement have not been fully realized. In most areas, practical considerations require provisions for non-English speakers in schools, courts, hospitals, and social services. In the private sector, the profit motive promotes multilingual accommodation in businesses, and in many communities advertising and marketing in several languages is the norm. Several major metropolitan areas, for example, support business directories in languages other than English. Nevertheless, English-only legislation opens the door to restrictions on public service assistance and free speech.

A friend of mine, a physician, voted in favor of an amendment to the California Constitution declaring English as the official language. He explained, “People come into my office every day, and they can’t speak a word of English.” His reasoning is flawed because people cannot be legislated into English proficiency.

Ultimately, newcomers want to learn English. They are well aware that English is necessary for academic and social success. If we want to address the need for immigrants to learn English, it would make sense to direct our political energy toward the expansion of underfunded adult education programs, where waiting lists for English classes are common. In general, limitations on language use threaten to exclude large sectors of our population from the mainstream instead of providing the education and services necessary to enfranchise them.

Summary

The U.S. population is changing dramatically as a result of immigration and other factors. Twenty-first century technologies have increased the availability and ease of communication and transportation and have changed the nature of the immigrant experience. Consequently, the melting pot and salad bowl models may be inadequate to describe the way we are changing as a nation.

Language is only one flashpoint in the debates about immigration, but it is a significant one, especially for educators. In the United States we tend to be linguistically unsophisticated, and our parochial attitudes about multilingualism have hurt us in international trade, national security, and diplomacy. The narrow view we often have about multilingualism, along with reactions to increased immigration and population changes, provides a growth medium for language restrictionists.

It is difficult to characterize U.S. identity. While assimilationism and pluralism seem to represent polar opposites, in fact “Americanization” is a process that includes both. National language policy is unclear, but multiple languages are part of our U.S. identity and are also socially, politically, and economically valuable. Schools can assist in promoting positive bilingualism for all children,

but such programs will require rethinking our national position on dual language instruction.

Questions to Think About and Discuss

1. Should the United States restrict immigration? Why or why not? If you think immigration should be restricted, what restrictions would you favor?
2. Should the United States have an official language? Why or why not?
3. Is there anything that your school or district does that promotes or represses the use of languages other than English?

Activities

1. Survey colleagues or classmates who have been educated outside the United States. Find out what the requirements were for foreign language learning in their native schools.
2. Survey high schools and colleges in your area. What, if any, are the foreign language requirements for graduation? What languages are offered? Which languages have the highest enrollments?
3. Survey friends, relatives, and colleagues using the following questions. How many of them would like to know another language? How many would favor foreign or modern language instruction in the schools? How many of them consider bilingual education desirable for English learners?
4. Is there a local ordinance, a statewide law, or language in a state constitution amendment that makes English the official language in your area? Is such legislation under consideration? What are the potential effects of such legislation?
5. Create an ethnic profile of the students in your class. How many different backgrounds are represented? To what extent do those having foreign backgrounds feel that they have maintained ties with their ethnic heritage(s)? With their language(s)? How do they feel about their relationship to their ethnic and linguistic heritage(s)?

Suggestions for Further Reading

Adams, K. L., and Brink, D. T. (Eds.). (1990). *Perspectives on official English: The campaign for English as the official language of the USA*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

This book contains an overview of the general issue of language policy and analyses of language policy around the world. The book then zeroes in on language policy in the United States with a detailed discussion of California's English-only proposition, as well

as discussions of language use and legislation in Florida, New York, and parts of the Southwest. One whole section is devoted to language legislation from the perspective of constitutional law. An appendix contains language legislation from several states, as of 1990.

- Baron, D. (1990). *The English-only question: An official language for Americans?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
This book is a detailed history of language policy in the United States. An appendix contains a map showing state legislation on English-only as of mid-1990.
- Bhatia, T. K., & Ritchie, W. C. (Eds.). (2004). *The handbook of bilingualism.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
This collection contains articles of interest on many aspects of bilingualism and is particularly useful to those interested in understanding bilingualism around the world. The section on global perspectives contains nine chapters on the uses of languages in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and North America.
- Crawford, J. (1992a). *Hold your tongue: Bilingualism and the politics of "English Only."* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
This book is a comprehensive discussion of American reactions to language diversity and an analysis of the English-only movement in the United States.
- Crawford, J. (Ed.). (1992b). *Language loyalties: A source book on the official English controversy.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
This book is a collection of articles and legal documents that reflect on language issues in every area of public life. It is an invaluable source for a serious student of U.S. language policy.
- Dicker, S. J. (1996). *Languages in America: A pluralist view.* Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
At a time when language policy is the subject of constant, and often vituperative, debate, this book makes the case for linguistic diversity, drawing on linguistics, history, sociology, and law.
- Gándara, P., & Hopkins, M. (2010). *Forbidden language: English learners and restrictive language policies.* New York: Teachers College Press.
This book is a collection of articles that examine the outcomes of language restrictionist policies in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts.
- Kloss, H. (1977). *The American bilingual tradition.* Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
An analysis of language policy in the United States. While this book is no longer published, it is a classic history of bilingualism and bilingual education, and it is generally considered a basic source of information in this area.
- McCarty, T. L., & Zepeda, O. (1995, Winter). Indigenous language education and literacy. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 19(1).
This special issue of the Bilingual Research Journal examines the goals and outcomes of bilingual programs in indigenous communities in North America. It merits the attention of those interested in Native American languages and education and contains an article by James Crawford on language endangerment.
- Perea, J. F. (Ed.). (1997). *Immigrants out! The new nativism and the anti-immigrant impulse in the United States.* New York: New York University Press.
This collection of articles reflects on nativism in the United States from both historical and contemporary perspectives. The relationships between newcomers and native-born Americans are analyzed historically, politically, and economically.
- Piatt, B. (1990). *¿Only English? Law and language policy in the United States.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

A historical and legal analysis of U.S. language policy, this book calls for a balanced formulation of language policy that can meet our political and personal needs in a multicultural and multilingual society.

Simon, P. (1980). *The tongue-tied American*. New York: Continuum.

While not a new publication, this collection of data, anecdotes, and information is still noteworthy. Simon's examples of the outcomes of our national monolingualism in the areas of international trade, national security, and diplomacy call attention to issues and problems that still exist today.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T., & Phillipson, R. (Eds.). (1994). *Linguistic human rights: Overcoming linguistic discrimination*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

The editors of this volume are language scholars and well-known proponents of the rights of language minority students. The papers in this book support the idea that "linguistic rights should be considered basic human rights" (p. 1) through an exploration of the issues of language policy in general, and specifically in a number of places around the world.

Tse, L. (2001). *Why don't they learn English? Separating fact from fallacy in the U.S. language debate*. New York: Teachers College Press.

English-only advocates, equating English with political loyalty and personal allegiance, often claim that immigrants don't want to learn English. Tse refutes their arguments and points out that "myths about immigrant language learning skew the public mindset on language-related issues, causing a misdirection of energy . . . toward solving phantom problems while ignoring true crises" (p. 72).

Web and Media Resources

The Language Flagship, www.thelanguageflagship.org. The Language Flagship represents a partnership that includes the public and private sectors and supports language learning in the United States. Check the link for K–12 pilot programs for an overview of promising practices in language education.

Ed Data Express, www.eddataexpress.ed.gov, a resource offered by the U.S. Department of Education, offers up-to-date data on education available state by state (plus Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico) in an easy-to-use format. It's an excellent resource on changing demographics in schools as well as other useful data about students, teachers, and schools.

MyEducationLab™

Go to the Topic *Cultural and Linguistic Diversity* in the MyEducationLab (www.myeducationlab.com) for your course, where you can:

- Find learning outcomes for *Cultural and Linguistic Diversity* along with the national standards that connect to these outcomes.
- Complete Assignments and Activities that can help you more deeply understand the chapter content.

- Apply and practice your understanding of the core teaching skills identified in the chapter with the Building Teaching Skills and Dispositions learning units.
- Examine challenging situations and cases presented in the IRIS Center Resources.
- Check your comprehension on the content covered in the chapter by going to the Study Plan in the Book Resources for your text. Here you will be able to take a chapter quiz, receive feedback on your answers, and then access Review, Practice, and Enrichment activities to enhance your understanding of chapter content. (optional)
- **A+RISE** Visit A+RISE. A+RISE[®] Standards2Strategy[™] is an innovative and interactive online resource that offers new teachers in grades K–12 just in time, research-based instructional strategies that meet the linguistic needs of ELLs as they learn content, differentiate instruction for all grades and abilities, and are aligned to Common Core Elementary Language Arts standards (for the literacy strategies) and to English language proficiency standards in WIDA, Texas, California, and Florida.

Sample page